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the general plan, hypotheses regarding the dates and authorship of the various plays, as well as references to the relation between the language of authors and scribes are scattered here and there through the Introduction in such a way as to render them practically inaccessible.

These are technical details, however, and for general students of the mediæval drama of less importance than the texts themselves. Here, then, they will find a miscellaneous collection of plays which were probably performed as well as transcribed by nuns, two of the plays early and characteristically Walloon in spirit as well as in form, two adapted with but few changes from non-dramatic moral poems and all worthy of study because of their provenance as well as their possible literary relations at home and abroad.

GRACE FRANK.

Baltimore.

A Survey of English Literature, 1780-1880. By OLIVER ELTON.
New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920. Four vols.

The first two of the four imposing volumes of Professor Elton's new work appeared in 1912, have therefore been subjected to their share of reviewing, for the most part favorable, and have already for nine years served efficiently their purpose and proved their worth, by no means small, in the world of scholarship. Since, however, the author has added to these volumes two more of the same size, over 400 pages each, and has extended the period treated from 1830 to 1880, the reviewer can hardly ignore the original volumes and give his attention only to the new ones, but is obliged, in the circumstances, to consider the whole work, old and new, as an organic unity.

To cover with efficiency one hundred of the most prolific and revolutionary years in English literature is an impressive under-

cision between *q(ue)* and *qu(e)*, *q(ui)* and *qu(i)*, *passim*, should have been avoided. Inconsistencies in the use of brackets, parentheses and italics, as well as discrepancies between the notes and text, are not infrequent (III, 144, 2214, 2470; v, 170; III, 2493; III, 295, v, 190, p. 11, note*, p. 20*, p. 81*, etc) and the many references of the type "Voyez, sur ce vers, l'Introduction" (III, 499, 1078, etc.) satisfy the conscience of the editor rather than the curiosity of the reader.

taking, even for a group of scholars, but when the task is accomplished single-handed, the display of so much courage, industry, and breadth of judgment demands our highest respect and admiration, and in this case something more—even our gratitude. Others have given the history of certain types of literature for longer periods than that of Mr. Elton's work; Professor Saintsbury has covered in two volumes in a more cursory manner the period from 1780 to 1860; and a group of scholars in the *Cambridge History of English Literature* have treated with the advantages and serious disadvantages of division of labor the period in question. Without belittling the merits of other and previous works in the same field, I am convinced that Mr. Elton has given us results much to be desired—a certain organic unity with component parts seen in their proper perspective, and minor ones not forgotten; a consistent intelligent following by a master mind of the continuity of development which makes no break with the period prior to 1780, admits no interruption in the period discussed, and comes to no clearly marked boundary in 1880. In fact, Professor Elton's healthy respect in the first few pages of his work for the early years of the eighteenth century at once commands our attention and wins our confidence. These years, he informs us, until 1780 are distinguished by the ascendancy of prose. The "reunion of poetry and prose under the rule of the free imagination is the great mark of our literature from 1780 to 1830."

In the first volume (p. 393), in a discussion of the official reviewers, the author recalls Edward Copleston's ironical advice to the young reviewer—"to work chiefly upon the preface of the book that he is noticing, for there he will discover 'a fund of wealth lying upon the surface'; and, above all, to find fault." With little inclination to find fault, though not unmindful that Mr. Elton prefers (III, 116), hard hitting after the manner of Macaulay to "the vague praise, or the cautious innuendo, which now often does duty for criticism," we do, on the other hand, feel impelled to heed well the limitations of this work as outlined in the Preface, to regret that the historical and biographical aspect has been kept well in the background, and that foreign influences have been but lightly touched; but to regard with pleasure the motto from Hazlitt on the title-page of the first edition, unfortunately forgotten in the new;—"I have endeavoured to feel what is good, and to give a reason for the faith that was in me, when

necessary, and when in my power." Like Matthew Arnold, with whom he is on the best of terms in this work, Mr. Elton as a critic is after the best that has been thought and said. So intent is he on bringing this to light, so broad is his conception of what English literature includes, or rather, shall we say, so imbued is he with what we might term a German mania for exhaustiveness, that few prominent minds within the period, regardless of the field of their mental activity, fail to find a place in his pages. Economists, political thinkers, orators, divines, scientists, reviewers, explorers, philosophers, critics, scholars, historians, nondescripts, and a whole galaxy of minor writers form the vast background of the great picture well in front of which, in due order and with proper emphasis, are clearly portrayed the prominent figures in English literature for the hundred years in question. If the author has not gratified our taste for foreign influences, he has at least made us realize the complicity of the domestic influences that are constantly acting and reacting on the subject-matter of any literature—influences that are too frequently lost to view in our intense search for the ancient, the foreign, and the remote. To expect that Mr. Elton or any one else can speak with authority or finality on each of the multitude that throngs his pages is too much to hope, but we are amazed at the dexterity with which he puts each in his place and rounds up his contribution to the realm of thought.

In the four volumes the author has loaded every line with ore, for the most part of his own mining. We are constantly impressed with the evidence of fresh original investigation, the fruits of sound scholarship and mature judgment. With absolute propriety we may say of Mr. Elton as he has said (III, 295) of Sir Leslie Stephen, "he delivers endless judgments in a brief Tacitean manner without a touch of arrogance." Not infrequently he pauses to weigh and set aside a long-accepted verdict in criticism, occasionally but not often accepting some popular view that should long ago have been forgotten. When, for instance, he states that Burke "detests first principles, derides pure analysis, and uses 'metaphysician' as a term of contumely" (I, 228), and joins with Buckle in taking for granted in Burke's later years "the unsettling of his saner judgment" (I, 239), we cannot agree without some qualifications. He is also too much concerned over "the Wordsworth who was to harden into a far stonier conservatism than

Scott's, and who lost, as Lord Morley has said, his interest in progress about the date of Waterloo (II, 73). Such assertions malign Wordsworth's better fame quite as much as the following statement, made without the light of Professor Harper's recent investigations, shields the regrettable event of his life: "And for self-reproach, as we have said, he has no remedy at all in his wallet; he never had serious occasion for it (II, 96). We, too, should like to dismiss "with satisfaction" the "spectral old scandal of Byron to the limbo of things unproven" (II, 161), and perhaps may yet be able to do so. Shelley must not be too harshly taken to task for a deficiency of remorse and self-reproach when we recall his repudiation of remorse and his determination to have none of it, although we can never know how well he succeeded:

Reproach not thine own soul, but know thyself,
Nor hate another's crime, nor loathe thine own.
It is the dark idolatry of self,
Which, when our thoughts and actions once are gone,
Demands that man should weep and bleed and groan;
Oh vacant expiation! Be at rest.—
The past is Death's the future is thine own.¹

Keats's "Bright star," as Sir Sidney has recently proved,² was not "the last of his poems, written on his voyage, under the shadow of death and the memory of unfulfilled love (II, 238). Neither do we believe that Keats in the expression of his preference of romance to the death-day of empires in the beginning of the second book of *Endymion* "puts the case in a young petulant way which delights us, and is merely true to youth, and romance" (II, 240); for we recall Browning's *Love among the Ruins*, which our author praises highly but misinterprets (III, 376), with its concluding line, "Love is best." We remember, also, in this connection those earnest words of Mr. Colvin penned during the dark days of the late war: "And when the future looks back on to-day, even on to-day, a death-day of empires in a sterner and vaster sense than any the world has known, will all the waste and hatred and horror, all the hope and heroism of the time, its tremendous issues and catastrophes, be really found to have eclipsed and superseded love as the fittest to fill the soul and inspire the songs of the

¹ *The Revolt of Islam*, 8, 22.

² Sir Sidney Colvin, *John Keats*, 1917, pp. 492-3.

poet?"³ In his criticism of Browning's poetry our author at least once is tempted into a certain grotesqueness of statement, a fault of Browning which he does not allow us to forget, and quite overlooks the true significance of the poem in question. "*The Flight of the Duchess*," he writes, "is an expression of the longing for escape which is heard in *Youth and Art*, or in the tale of Jules and Phene. Go off to the gypsies, like the Duchess, or to a garret and live on love, or to 'some unsuspected isle in the far seas!' Go with your mate, your lover, and damn the consequences, for 'God's in his Heaven!'" (III, 371). Browning, if we mistake not, was more intent on ridiculing that from which the escape was made than in defending the escape. He had in mind a fad then too common in England of attempting to restore the lifeless customs of a dead past because they were thought aristocratic. Our author also seems to forget that this poem is put in the mouth of an eccentric character.

But to attempt to record all of the points on which we disagree with Mr. Elton is futile. They are few and widely scattered compared with those on which we are in accord, and perhaps are still fewer compared with those on which we have no decided opinion, and about which we are content to learn from his words of wisdom. For the most part we feel that he brings his message fresh from his reading; only now and then betraying a too implicit reliance on memory, as for instance, in his account of Landor's *The Empress Catherine and Princess Dashkof* he mistakes Dashkof for Catherine's lover (II, 36); or makes Browning's Ivàn Ivànovitch kill his own wife instead of Dmitri's (III, 389); or has Eppie in *Silas Marner* chance "on the discovery of the long-murdered body" (IV, 268); or supposes the son in Byron's *Werner* really falls in love with the daughter of the victim (II, 167); or when he quotes Pope's line on Defoe as "Earless, on high, stands unabashed" (II, 138), instead of "Earless on high, stood unabash'd," as Pope wrote it.

Professor Elton is a critic with strong convictions, but not with prejudices. He approaches his subject with no passionate attachments to defend or inveterate antipathies to revenge. His remarks are everywhere characterized by the spirit of fairness, the desire

³ *Idem.*, p. 183.

to present the truth with no personal bias; by a conservatism that seldom betrays him into such a sweeping and doubtful assertion as: "He [Byron] has affected the spirit of poetry more than any modern man except Shakespeare and Goethe, and on the whole he has deserved to do so" (II, 181); by an inclination to find as much merit and praise as possible; and by no eagerness to linger over faults and scandals. His estimates strike home with a brevity and felicity of expression that startle and please.

The work is very readable, inspiring while it instructs, in a style that is terse, lucid, occasionally tinged with humor or irony, but never carried beyond the bounds of scholarly accuracy on a tide of unrestrained enthusiasm. We have found nothing in the work better than the chapter on Blake; we believe the author more at home with Tennyson than Browning, with Thackeray than Dickens; and admire without applauding his defence of Byron, Macaulay, and Arnold; while we suspect he does not entirely catch the purport and spirit of Carlyle and Newman. On the whole we prefer the first two volumes to the last two, but should not care to lose any. We regret that the valuable notes at the end of each volume did not find a place at the bottom of their respective pages where they would be more serviceable, and that the author did not give us a separate bibliography instead of burying it in his notes. It is to be hoped that in the next issue of the work the separate indices in volumes II and IV will be combined. On the whole this is an excellent, much needed work that will not soon be superseded.

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The American Novel. By CARL VAN DOREN. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921.

Mr. Van Doren's work is not a series of biographical and critical studies of more or less eminent American novelists. It is, as it professes to be, "a chapter in the history of the American imagination." The term *novel* is consequently interpreted as including "long prose narratives in which the element of fact is on the whole less than the element of fiction," and the method is historical rather than critical. The result is the most valuable contribution